Anne Herbert

A life in the Wars of the Roses

Ian Dawson



May I introduce you to Anne Herbert, Countess of Pembroke? I'm very fond of this modern imagined portrait by Graham Turner, partly because of the colour and detail but chiefly because it conveys a respect for the people who lived in the past and especially for Anne herself. My interest in Anne began some years ago when planning a still unwritten novel on the experiences of people who lived through the Wars of the Roses. Seeking characters whose lives spanned the wars I discovered Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers and his sister Anne (c.1433-late 1480s) who married William Herbert, one of Edward IV's leading supporters, and lived most of her life at Raglan castle in Monmouthshire.

Finding out about individual fifteenth-century women in any depth is very difficult unless they're queens or those letter-writing Paston women. I started my search for Anne in monographs and articles and began finding scattered references which took me into printed primary sources and two research theses on William Herbert and his estates. I was surprised by how many fragments of information appeared – but does this evidence create a detailed portrait of Anne? Read on to find out!

Family, childhood and marriage

Anne was born Anne Devereux around 1433, the daughter of Sir Walter Devereux and his wife Elizabeth whose main home was at Weobley in Herefordshire. Elizabeth died when Anne was five perhaps giving birth to Anne's sister, Katherine.

Reverie by Graham Turner. The coat of arms in the window contains the Herbert and Devereux badges which can also been in the contemporary manuscript illustration on p. 8.
Painting by Graham Turner
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The Devereux and Merbury families are typical of the gentry who filled key roles in regional and county government and upon whom every king depended for maintaining good order and raising royal armies. Elizabeth Merbury was the daughter of John Merbury, a Herefordshire landowner and leading royal servant in south Wales under Henry IV and Henry V. The Devereux family demonstrates the gentry's commitment to fighting for their kings.

Anne's great-grandfather was killed fighting against Owain Glyndwr. Her grandfather fought at Agincourt and her father also served in Normandy under the banner of Richard, Duke of York. Anne's brother's military experience was, however, very different. Instead of fighting in France, he fought in three, possibly as many as six, battles of the Wars of the Roses.

Anne's childhood is invisible to us apart from one detail. In 1438 her grandfather John Merbury made his will, leaving £100 to five year-old Anne, to be used towards her wedding. This was a very large sum, perhaps suggesting he'd been charmed by his little grand-daughter.

Like many girls of her class, Anne may have spent time in the household of a family connection. One possibility, given her father's service with the Duke of York, is that Anne joined the household of the Duchess of York, Cecily Neville, whose major residence was at Ludlow Castle, twenty miles from Weobley.

The next record of Anne appears in an indenture agreed between her father and William Herbert for the marriage between William and Anne to take place at Weobley between 10 August and 30 November 1449. Anne's father agreed to pay a dowry of 500 marks and provide 'meat and drink' for William 'and forty of his men and their horses' and pay for Anne's 'apparrell competent pertaining to her degree'. That £100 from her grandfather must have come in useful.

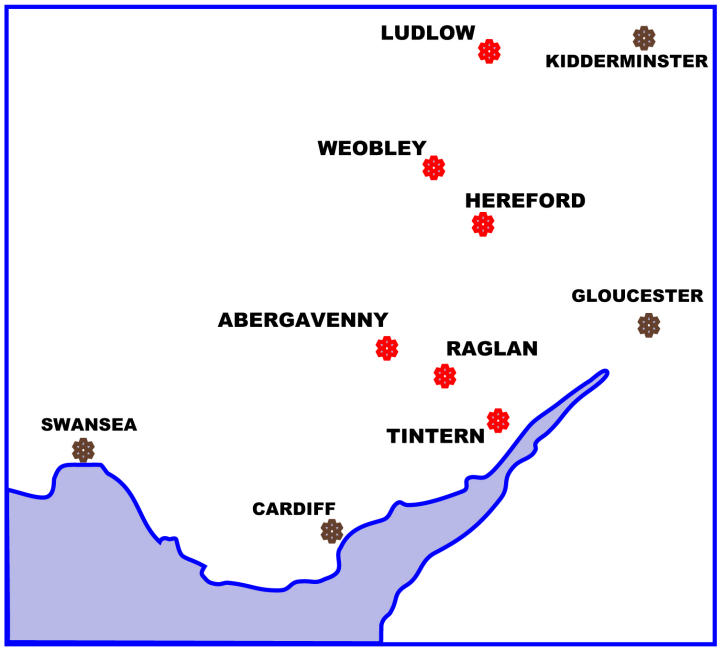
The marriage seems a logical one. Both fathers were important landowners on the Welsh border and had served in France under the Duke of York. Anne's father was also one of York's senior councillors, strengthening William's links to York who, in 1449, was heir apparent to the crown and so a man well-worth being close to.

Does the marriage tell us anything about Anne? Perhaps, very hesitantly, it can if we think about what sort of wife William was looking for. William was in his mid-twenties, an experienced soldier. His later career shows him as very ambitious so when seeking a wife he probably envisaged a life of increasing responsibility involving many absences from Raglan, both in France and wider afield in Wales. It seems likely that in choosing a wife (and he would not have been short of options) he would seek someone he could rely on to fulfil her responsibilities in his absence. Could William's confidence in Anne's abilities, revealed later in his will, have already been influencing his choice of her as his wife, young though she was in 1449?

Anne certainly fulfilled the most important of wifely duties, giving birth to at least nine children during 20 years of marriage. A seventeenth-century history of the Herberts, the *Herbertorum Prosapia*, contains an illustration of William and Anne's tomb at Tintern Abbey (destroyed in the sixteenth century) which shows carvings of nine children on the tomb, three boys and six girls. Seven of the children were still living in 1469 when William made his will. This level of fertility may not be surprising given that William was well practised in fathering children. His will refers to his five illegitimate children born to two different mothers before his marriage to Anne. There is no evidence of further illegitimate children after their marriage.

Before any of her children were born, however, Anne had an early opportunity for responsibility at Raglan. Early in 1450 William joined an expeditionary force to Normandy, was captured in April at the battle of Formigny and had to pay a ransom for his freedom. Formigny and the ensuing English loss of Normandy was a turning point for William and Anne. William perforce now focused on lands and politics at home but Anne's anxieties and responsibilities did not decrease. Instead she and William faced a series of political crises

A map of places around Anne's homes at Weobley and Raglan which are mentioned in this article.



This family tree shows Anne's immediate parents, brother and sister. It was unusual for her father, widowed aged about 27, not to marry again as he could have gained more land and wealth through a judicious marriage.

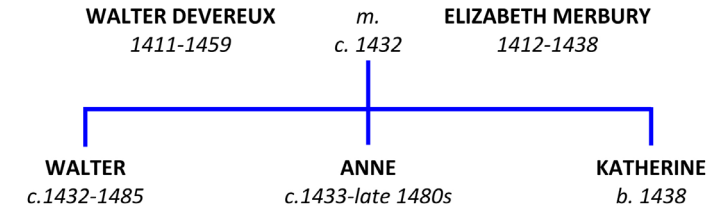


Table of *Dramatis personae*

William Herbert, earl of Pembroke	Anne's husband
Sir Walter Devereux	Anne's father
Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers	Anne's brother
William and Walter Herbert	Anne's sons
Maud Herbert	Anne's daughter who married Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland
Henry Tudor (Henry VII)	Anne's ward 1461-1470
Margaret Beaufort	Mother of Henry Tudor
Henry VI	King of England 1422-1461, 1470-1471
Edward IV	King of England 1461-1470, 1471-1483
Richard III	King of England 1483-1485

The only contemporary illustration of William and Anne from The Troy Book that they commissioned.
Compare the badges on their robes with the coat of arms in the window of Graham Turner's painting on p. 6.
© British Library (BL Royal MS 18 D11, f.6)



throughout the 1450s.

1450-1461: children, crises and a manuscript

This is the hardest period in which to catch glimpses of Anne. There's a constant danger of describing William's actions and assuming this tells us about Anne. Having said that, it would also be disingenuous to omit events which must have affected her because we don't know her actions or reactions. The best we can manage is to hypothesise about the events that caused her the greatest concerns.

To understand Anne's experiences we need a sense of 1450s politics. In 1450 Henry VI was 29 but no more effective than he'd been 28 years earlier when he became king aged nine months. His failings were the central reason for the political problems of the period.

The years between 1450 and 1455 were dominated by a struggle between the Dukes of Somerset and York to be the King's chief councillor. William supported the Duke of York, becoming involved in a number of outbreaks of violence which meant that Anne experienced political crises alongside her first pregnancies. Since we don't know the birth-dates of her children we also don't know how closely crises and pregnancies coincided. The exception was May 1455 when Anne, then 22, was either in the last stages of pregnancy or recovering from the birth of her eldest son. At the same time her father, husband and perhaps her brother fought for York at the first battle of St Albans against Somerset's army. This was a small-scale battle but the dangers must have appeared no less to Anne than if it had been on a much larger scale.

York's victory at St Albans led to four years of uneasy peace although violence was never far away. In 1456 William and Anne's father, Walter Devereux, led 2,000 men on behalf of York to recapture Carmarthen Castle which was being held for King Henry. They succeeded but were soon put on trial for treason in Hereford in front of King Henry and Queen Margaret. Anne's father was imprisoned but William was pardoned, an example of Margaret's desire for conciliation. It's not impossible that Anne could have played a part in this pardon. One of the roles expected of ladies of her rank was to act as intermediaries, seeking pardon and mercy in situations where it may have appeared unbecoming for men to do so. As the trial was in Hereford, only 30 miles from Raglan, Anne could well have been present and able to plead with Queen Margaret who, at 27, was only three years older than Anne herself.

Anne's father died in April 1459 but her brother, also called Walter, showed the same consistent loyalty to the Duke of York. In October 1459 Walter was at Ludford with York when he confronted the king's army. York's ignominious flight led to Walter being attainted but he escaped execution after kneeling before Queen Margaret and begging for pardon. York and his closest supporters were now condemned traitors. How did the Herberts deal with this change in power?

To find the answer we can turn to the only contemporary illustration of Anne and William on page 8, the frontispiece of a book they commissioned. It has long been believed that the book was given to Edward IV in the early 1460s and that the king in the picture is therefore Edward. However Dr Sonja Drimmer of the University of Massachusetts Amherst has recently argued that the Herberts commissioned the book as a gift for Henry VI in the months between York's flight to exile from Ludford in October 1459 and the Yorkist victory at Northampton in July 1460. This was the period when the political tide had turned against York and the Herberts needed to show their loyalty to Henry, hence William and Anne being shown with hands outstretched, perhaps in supplication to King Henry. The book wasn't completed before the Yorkist success at Northampton changed the political situation, however, and there was no longer need to placate Henry. According to Dr Drimmer, the unfinished manuscript was then collected by the Herbert family from the illustrator and never given to its intended recipient. If they had meant it for Edward IV there would have been many opportunities to present it after 1461. Instead it remained in the Herbert family's possession.

Further rapid changes in political fortunes meant that even greater anxiety lay ahead for Anne. York was killed at the battle of Wakefield in December 1460 but his mantle was taken up by his 18-year-old son, Edward. Sometime early in 1461 Anne bade farewell to William and probably did not see him again for over three months. During that time William and Anne's brother Walter fought for Edward in his first victory, at Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire, then accompanied him to London and were with Edward at the York property of Baynard's Castle when he was proclaimed king. They then fought for Edward when he beat the Lancastrian army in the snow at Towton, confirming his hold on the crown.



Lady Margaret Beaufort(1443-1509), mother of Henry VII
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Table of events 1450-1461

1450-1455	Continuing disputes between Dukes of Somerset and York over who would be Henry VI's chief councillor.
1455	Battle of St Albans between forces of York and Somerset. Somerset killed.
1455-1459	Period of uneasy peace
1459	Beginning of sequence of battles which lasted until March 1461. Flight of Yorkists into exile from Ludford; attainder of Yorkists in Parliament.
1460	Yorkists return and victorious at Northampton; York claims throne and accepted by nobles as Henry VI's heir. York killed at battle of Wakefield.
1461	Edward of York victorious at battles of Mortimer's Cross and Towton, establishing himself as King Edward IV.

Still only 28, Anne was by now the mother of several children and had lived through ten years of uncertainty during which her husband had been imprisoned, accused of treason and fought in and survived three battles. Despite that summary we've hardly been able to see Anne herself except to make assumptions about her likely responses to situations. Fortunately we can see her a little more clearly in the 1460s.



A reconstruction illustration by Ivan Lapper of Fountain Court at Raglan Castle which shows the luxurious building work undertaken during the 1460s.
© CADW

1461-1469: children, guests and an execution

Edward IV was now king and William one of his most trusted supporters but for Anne life at Raglan in the 1460s was probably very noisy. One reason was that Raglan was full of growing children as Anne's pregnancies continued and William's success brought more children into her care. William had the wealth and political clout to buy the wardship of Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland and of Henry Tudor, earl of Richmond, aged four in 1461. William paid Edward IV £1,000 for Henry's wardship and marriage because Henry was expected to grow into a significant role in the Yorkist regime and the Herberts planned to marry him to their daughter Maud.

Henry's presence at Raglan led to at least one week-long visit, in September 1467, by Henry's mother Margaret Beaufort. Margaret can be easily thought of as always the devout, austere figure she eventually became but she was only 24 in 1467, happily married to Henry Stafford and very much part of the Yorkist court. As Anne was just ten years her senior we perhaps ought to imagine them as young women together, possibly building a friendship from their mutual support for young Henry, something we'll return to later.

The second source of noise surrounding Anne came from an array of masons, sculptors, glaziers, tilers, painters and other craftsmen. The rebuilding of Raglan Castle was in full swing. This work had been begun in the 1430s by William's father, William ap Thomas, but in the 1460s William ploughed his new wealth into creating a truly palatial home. Family and guest apartments had large, glass-filled windows, tapestries hung on the walls and the castle was surrounded by fruit orchards, gardens and a deer park. It was also very well planned. Visiting Raglan today one of the striking features is how compact the castle is, with one court providing the services of kitchens, buttery, offices and so on and the other (shown in the illustration above) providing comfort with the hall, chapel and chambers for family and guests.

With William's absences frequent and lengthy, Anne played a major part in supervising the rebuilding. Estate accounts show her making purchases, receiving cash and paying creditors, the daily business of keeping a major building project on the move.

Many of William's absences were due to his role in securing Wales against Lancastrian threats. Working with Anne's brother Walter, he took control of the whole of Wales. Within a year, only Harlech Castle was holding out, leading to the description of William as Edward's 'master-lock', the man who kept Wales secure for Edward. In return King Edward loaded William with offices, lands and other rewards. Both William and Walter Devereux were summoned to Edward IV's first parliament as members of the Lords. William was made a Knight of the Garter in 1462 and earl of Pembroke in 1468 after he finally captured Harlech Castle.

William was also absent from Raglan attending parliament and court. Unless pregnancy intervened, Anne presumably accompanied William to London in 1465 for the coronation of Edward's queen, Elizabeth Woodville, and for the ceremonies accompanying the marriage in 1466 of their eldest son, 11-year-old William, to Mary Woodville, 10-year-old sister of the queen. It had been a dramatic rise for the Herberts from gentry family to relatives of the royal family.

But this rise came at a cost. Hostility had developed between King Edward and his leading adviser, Richard Neville, earl of Warwick. Among the reasons for this hostility was Warwick's anger at Edward's closeness to rising courtiers, one of whom was William Herbert.

In July 1469 Warwick instigated a rebellion in the north known as Robin of Redesdale's rising. William and his brother Richard raised a Welsh force on behalf of King Edward and headed east to join another royal army led by the earl of Devon. Something went badly wrong – some sources suggest Herbert and Devon quarrelled over billeting – and Herbert's army faced Warwick's men alone at Edgecote on 24 July and were defeated. William was captured then executed two days later.

That human tragedy provides us with William's will, written before he left Wales in mid-July. In his will William says that Anne should 'have the chief rule in performing my will and to be one of my executors' and implored her 'to take the mantle and the ring and live a widow'. On the morning of his execution he added a codicil saying: 'and wife that you remember your

promise to me to take the order of widowhood, as you may be the better master of your own to perform my will and help my children, as I love and trust you.'

We can read these words in different ways. Was William's intended tone loving and soft, maybe wistful or perhaps anxious? Or was it peremptory, suggesting he was less concerned about Anne herself than about protecting his son's inheritance from the clutches of widow-marrying lords?

It would be nice to think it was the gentler version, especially as William adds to the codicil that he wishes Anne to 'pray for me, and take the said order that you promist me, as you had in my life my heart and love'. These words have strong echoes of the words 'as I love and trust you' in his will.

So in the 1460s we have a few more dots to help us build a picture of Anne – her supervision of building work, more children, her care of wards including Henry of Richmond, Margaret Beaufort's visit, William's will but despite this Anne's own reactions and emotions remain invisible.



Henry VII (1485-1509)
© National Portrait Gallery, London

1469-1485: widowhood, poetry and Bosworth

The aftermath of Edgecote created another connection with Margaret Beaufort. Henry of Richmond (though at 12 too young to fight) had been with William Herbert at Edgecote and was taken from the battlefield to Weobley, Anne's childhood home, where she too had gone on hearing news of William's death. Margaret sent servants to Weobley to protect her son and also made gifts to servants of both Anne and her brother, Walter, as thanks for their protection of Henry.

Anne gave up her wardship of Henry during the brief restoration of Henry VI (1470-1471) after seemingly amicable negotiations between her lawyers and those of Margaret Beaufort. When Edward regained his crown Henry fled to Brittany, ending the plans for him to marry Maud Herbert who instead married another of Anne's wards, Henry, earl of Northumberland. It was Maud who inherited the unfinished manuscript containing the illustration of Anne and William discussed above.

The early 1470s saw Anne closely involved in the administration of her son's estates. Estate papers, accounts and numerous examples of payments, for example for repairs to buildings, all bear evidence of her supervision. We also have a very different source shedding a little light on Anne. The fifteenth century was a great age for Welsh praise-poets, who wrote and recited poems in the houses of the great. One of the best known was Guto'r Glyn, for some time resident poet at Raglan. In his poem 'To the Countess Anne of Raglan', Guto'r Glyn describes Anne variously as:

> 'A second Sibyl, wise and fair, from the court of Weobley.'
>
> 'An earl's wife was so faithful to her husband'
>
> 'There is not a better face to be found dressed in black'

It is worth noting that this poetry was in Welsh which suggests that Anne understood and perhaps spoke Welsh to at least some extent.

And so to the final dramas in Anne's story which surrounded the battle of Bosworth in 1485 when Anne was 52. We know nothing of Anne's feelings when her former ward, Henry of Richmond, emerged as Richard III's rival for the crown or when Henry briefly considered marrying one of Anne's daughters after it was rumoured that King Richard was about to marry Elizabeth of York to prevent Henry marrying Elizabeth himself.

Four of Anne's close family may have been involved when Henry faced Richard at Bosworth on 22 August 1485.

Anne's brother Walter Devereux was killed fighting for Richard III. Walter's support for Richard is usually taken for granted because he fits that simple label 'Yorkist', having served Richard of York in the 1450s and been a key supporter of Edward IV. But Bosworth wasn't a simple York v Lancaster battle. Many Yorkists had rebelled against Richard and thrown their weight behind Henry Tudor. It wouldn't be entirely surprising if Walter had been one of them, having been a member of the Prince of Wales' council (the deposed Edward V). He wasn't part of Richard's inner circle and didn't receive major rewards from Richard. So why Walter was with Richard is unclear.

Anne's elder son William might also have fought for Richard III because after the death of his first wife he'd married Richard's illegitimate daughter Katherine. However there is no evidence that William did fight at Bosworth. Was it because of remembrance of his father's fate, memories of growing up with Henry Tudor or doubts about Richard III? Maybe it was just one of those everyday mishaps that disrupt everyone's lives – perhaps he was simply ill. Not all actions need be explained by significant causes.

Anne's second son Walter had also grown up with Henry at Raglan in the 1460s. Walter was sent by Richard III (along with Rhys ap Thomas) to intercept Henry as he marched out of Wales but at the same time Henry had high hopes that Walter would join him. Walter certainly made no attempt to stop Henry's march through Wales and

may have fought for Henry although no sources name him as having done so. Even if Walter didn't join Henry his neutrality was useful.

And finally there was Anne's son-in-law, Henry earl of Northumberland, another who had grown up at Raglan, husband of her daughter Maud. Northumberland famously lined up on Richard's side but took no part in the battle.

Perhaps we can imagine Anne waiting at Raglan, assuming a battle was taking place, memories of Edgcote strong in her mind, not just ignorant of the fate of her closest relatives but not even sure which side they were fighting on or if they were fighting at all. When news of the battle arrived her emotions were probably a mixture of grief and relief but again we can only make assumptions.

Friendship, conclusions and a mystery

Several months later Anne received a summons to London to meet her former ward, now King Henry VII, whom she'd last seen in 1471 when he was just 14. King Henry granted his 'most dear cousin' Anne safe passage to London but no detail appears to exist about what took place between them. However it is highly likely that it was a friendly meeting and that Henry's mother, Margaret Beaufort was there. Why?

I suspect that in the 1460s Anne and Margaret had become friends. No letters prove this but there is one tiny clue. Much later, in the early 1500s, Margaret kept rooms in her palace at Collyweston (Northamptonshire) for one of Anne's daughters, Lady Anne Powis. Lady Powis was, until her death, one of Margaret's companions and when Margaret herself died she left a piece of jewellery, 'a heart of gold with a fair sapphire', to Lady Powis's daughter who was, of course, Anne Herbert's grand-daughter. This continuing connection suggests a strong bond between the families, perhaps a sign of Margaret's gratitude to Anne for her care in bringing up her son Henry.

Anne died in the early years of Henry VII's reign and was buried at Tintern Abbey alongside her husband whom, it appears, she had supported fully in his career, in the management of their estates and in the rebuilding of Raglan Castle. In supporting William, Anne's life was deeply affected by the politics and battles of the Wars of the Roses. She must have experienced great anxiety, sometimes grief, sometimes relief but also wealth, the excitement of family promotion and the rise to royal connections.

Having said that, how detailed a picture can we really build of Anne Herbert? As we might expect we don't know those things that create the individuality of a human being: what she looked like, her hair and eye colour, who her friends were, what made her laugh, her favourite food, prayers, clothes, places. We don't know if she was good-natured or bad-tempered, generous or mean, close to her brother and sister but she does seem to have been hard-working, with a sense of duty to her family, husband and son, capable of inspiring affection and friendship and independent-minded – she never did re-marry after William's death.

And finally what kind of relationship did she have with William? Perhaps there's a clue in one final mystery. In 1968 a large gold ring was found near Raglan Castle. It's a signet ring used to authenticate documents or close letters. The design on the ring is a lion and it's delicately decorated with a floral pattern. Two initials – W and A – are also inscribed on the ring together with the words 'to yow feythfoull'.

Who did the Raglan ring belong to? The lion was a badge of the Herbert family and experts date the ring to 1440-1475. 'W' for William, 'A' for Anne?

And what makes the temptation of this identification greater is the wording of William's will in which he said, as if speaking directly to Anne, 'you had in my life my heart and love' and 'as I love and trust you'.

Perhaps 'to yow feythfoull' does sum up the relationship between William and Anne – it would be nice to think so.

I am grateful to Dr Sonja Drimmer of the University of Massachusetts Amherst for discussing by email her work on The Troy Book.

Further reading

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J.R. Kenyon, *Raglan Castle*, CADW, 2003

Dictionary of National Biography, especially entries for William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers

The Poetry of Guto'r Glyn can be found at: www.wales.ac.uk/en/CentreforAdvancedWelshCelticStudies/ResearchProjects/CompletedProjects/PoetryofGutorGlyn/IntroductiontotheProject.aspx

Ian Dawson has worked as a schoolteacher, university teacher, teacher-trainer and as Director of the Schools History Project. He won a national teaching award for university teaching, has written and edited around 100 books for schools including a recent A-level book *The Wars of the Roses* and has also told the story of Anne Herbert in a new Key Stage 3 textbook in Hodder Education's *Making Sense of History* series. He is an Honorary Fellow of The Historical Association.



Gold signet ring, from Raglan, Monmouthshire, Wales, mid-15th century AD
© National Museums & Galleries of Wales

How much was it worth?

Estimating the modern value of sums of money from the past is notoriously difficult. However the converter on the National Archives website offers the following estimates for amounts mentioned in this article.

£100 left to Anne by her grandfather – around £50,000

500 marks for Anne's dowry – around £160,000

£1,000 paid by William for wardship of Henry Tudor – around £500,000

Independent, intelligent Lady of Raglan Castle, medieval Grand Design. Widowed at Edgecote Fearful at Bosworth. Her ward became king #HAbiog